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ROBERT MONROE sits at the master board in the control room at the Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences in Afton, where students explore what psychologists call "out of the body experiences." Through the control room, Mr. Monroe can adjust inputs to isolation rooms and monitor responses. The Institute uses pulsed sound to teach students to control the "out of body experience." A patented method of inducing sleep is a by-product of the Institute's research.

(N-V Photo by Hotz)

Afton Resident Works To Change Science Fiction into Science Fact

By LEE HOTZ
N-V Staff Writer

AFTON — Robert Monroe woke up one night to find himself floating against the ceiling.

Below on the bed, he saw the sleeping form of his wife. Someone was slumbering peacefully beside her.

Himself.

His first thought was that he was dying; his second that he was in the middle of a crazy dream. A thorough physical by his doctor convinced him he was healthy. An interview with a psychologist convinced him he was sane.

What happened to Mr. Monroe is what psychologists call an "out of body experience." Others call it astral projection. The conscious mind becomes separated from the body. The mind, the spirit, the soul, is then able to travel without the physical form to other places on this planet and to places apparently not on this earth.

Sound like science fiction? Perhaps. But Robert Monroe at age 61, when many of his contemporaries are contemplating their golf games or looking forward to retirement, is working to change science fiction into science fact.

That first "out of body experience" occurred almost 19 years ago. Overcoming his fear, both for his own sanity and of the ridicule of his friends, he began to study the phenomenon, apparently mastered it, and now says he can induce it almost at will.

Three years ago, he opened the Monroe Institute of Applied Sciences in a converted studio on his 640 acre farm, Whistlefield, near Afton. The Institute is devoted to the study of the "out of body experience," and to training others in its use.

"Our mode is the engineering mode," said Mr. Monroe as he sat in his study at the Institute during the recent cold spell.

A chilling wind blew down off the mountain fluttering the insulation at the windows. The pipes had frozen that morning. Plumbers and workmen trooped in and out of the building with propane torches. Air gurgled and rushed in the pipes as they worked to thaw them.

"We find something and we say, 'How can we use this?' Our reaction is not to just publish a paper and leave it at that," he explained. "We are not really interested in Psi and Esp phenomena. That surprises some people, but that's rather old hat to us," he said. "That's like looking to see if the toes wiggle and we are interested in the whole body."

When asked about his own personal experience with the phenomenon, he queries back, "Have you read my book?"

His book, "Journeys Out of The Body," details his own experiences, his first fears, his experiments, and his final

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confidence as an experienced voyager.

"Fame and fortune were not in my mind when I wrote the book," he said. "There are easier ways to make money." He was primarily concerned that a published account of the experiences exist so that others who spontaneously went "out of their body" would know that they were not losing their minds.

Published in five languages, the book has received wide distribution.

Mr. Monroe does not think that he holds the key to a new religion. He does feel that he has an apparently measurable phenomenon that deserves study.

The Institute is the tool for that study. "This is very much a frontier research area," he said. "We are taking parts and pieces of things that people have done elsewhere and synthesizing them into a whole."

Several programs are offered at the Institute, the most controversial of which is called "The Star System." Described in the Institute bulletin as "an intensive program for a physical life of predicted short duration," the course is designed for terminal patients.

"It lets the terminal patient know that he survives death," said Mr. Monroe. "That's the least part of it, but that's what we're talking about. We have evolved methods that are about 15 per cent effective for allowing these people to leave their bodies.

"There is a big difference between having hope and faith that you have a life after death, and a big quantum jump to knowing. You don't have to hold a gun to your head to perceive it."

Other courses offered at the Institute include "Pain Reduction — a series for those in a chronic pain condition, with progressive steps to place pain in a self-regulated mode."

The course is part of what Mr. Monroe calls the Stress Tension Reduction Program. "We want to give these people the mental tools to control pain. We can't change the environment, but we can change their reaction to the environment," he explained.

The program is presently being evaluated at the University of Kansas Medical Center and at the Gladman Memorial Hospital in Oakland, Calif., he explained.

At the Arkansas Rehabilitation Center in Hots Springs, Ark., the program is being evaluated by the Federal government, he said. The Center does such evaluations for rehabilitation centers throughout the United States, he explained.

"Our techniques are non-chemical, non-drug, and non-electrical," Mr. Monroe said. The basic tool that the Institute uses to induce the mental states is sound; pulsed sound and self-discipline.

Experimenting with what Programs Director Nancy Lea Honeycutt called "pink noise and binaural beeps," the Institute has discovered a number of related effects.

Recently, they patented a method of inducing controlled sleep using these sounds. They hope that the method will be useful in surgery, partially replacing the use of anesthesia.

Mr. Monroe played a demonstration tape. The student was placed in a small booth, one of several used for the purpose at the Institute.

In the booth was a cot encircled by copper tubing. The tubing was to insulate the student from radio and television frequencies in the atmosphere, he explained. On the cot, resting on the pillow, was a pair of stereo headphones. A microphone hung down from the ceiling.

The student removed his shoes, emptied his pockets, got onto the cot, and put on the headphones. The door was closed. The lights went out. The booth is, for all intents and purposes, an isolation chamber.

The tape begins in the dark with the sound of the ocean roaring in the left ear. As Mr. Monroe explained the features of the room, the waves slowly washed over the inside of the student's head into the right ear.

Pink noise replaced the sound of the ocean waves, soon followed by a demonstration of the binaural beeps. However, the pink noise quickly put the student to sleep, almost instantaneously.

After the demonstration, the student expressed his embarrassment at falling asleep. Mr. Monroe just laughed.

"That happens to about 60 per cent of the people the first time," he said. The trick is to hold yourself at the threshold of sleep where the body is asleep but the mind is still conscious, he explained.

Some people complain bitterly about someone snoring loudly through their session only to have it proved on tape that they are the ones doing the snoring.

The pink noise used in the demonstration is one of the components of the patented sleep induction method.

Offered at the Institute and at three other related centers across the country is the M-5000 Program. That program is designed to introduce persons to the "out of body experience." Beginning with an intensive weekend session, the student then works on his own for six months to a year to master the effect.

"Nothing magical happens over the weekend," Mr. Monroe said. "It takes an enormous amount of discipline. You don't learn to play the violin simply by having one placed in your hands and then having someone say, 'There are the strings.'

"In the past, we have just been dealing with a sub-culture, but now we are achieving a new legitimacy," he said. The Insitute has an advisory board consisting of about 33 engineers and psychologists, he explained.

Some people would say that Robert Monroe has an odd hobby. Others might call him a pioneer. But Robert Monroe is a cautious man, and perhaps people should just wait, like him, until all the results are in.

All that can be said is that work is going on in the small brown studio that houses the Institute. People seem busy. Lights flash. Tapes roll. Visitors come and go.

"Everybody is interested in what happens to them when they die," said Mr. Monroe.